LETTER FROM L.D. TROTSKY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CC AND CCC OF THE RKP(b), OCTOBER 8, 1923

Top Secret

To the Members of the CC and CCC [1]—

1. One of the proposals made by Comrade Dzerzhinsky's commission[2] (regarding strikes, etc.) states that Party members who are aware of factional groupings within the Party must be

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[1] This letter from L.D. Trotsky was a logical consequence of events: the decision of the September Plenum regarding the composition of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic (RVSR) and the manner in which that decision was presented to the Party (specifically, the concealment of the true reasons, which stemmed primarily from the intra-Party struggle) served as the immediate impetus for Trotsky to set out in detail his position on critical issues concerning the Central Committee's internal policy.

As G.E. Zinoviev later admitted (in 1926), in order to isolate Trotsky, meetings of a factional "leadership core" were held prior to Politburo sessions; all issues slated for discussion by the Politburo were pre-decided at these meetings. Thus, the very form of the communication—a written appeal by Trotsky to bodies of which he was himself a member—reflected the situation within the Party leadership, a situation that effectively precluded any other method for raising and discussing pressing economic and socio-political problems.

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The *Vestnik* excerpt appeared in English as "First Letter to the Central Committee, October 8, 1923" in Leon Trotsky, *The Challenge of the Left Opposition (1923–25).* Naomi Allen (ed.), Marilyn Vogt, trans.. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1975; pp. 50–58. —t.d.

[2] This refers to a commission including F.E. Dzerzhinsky, G.E. Zinoviev, V.M. Molotov, A.I. Rykov, I.V. Stalin, and M.P. Tomsky, established to analyze the economic and intra-party situation in accord with a Politburo decision dated 18 September 1923. The results of its work were reported at an expanded meeting of the Politburo on 20 September and at the Plenum of the Central Committee on 23 September. No materials from the commission itself have been found. However, it is logical to assume that they formed the basis of F.E. Dzerzhinsky's report at the September Plenum. The commission was dissolved by a decision of the Politburo of the Central Committee on 24 December 1923. —V.P. Vilkova

required to report this immediately to the GPU,[3] the Central Committee (CC), and the Central Control Commission (CCC).

It would seem that notifying the Party organization when elements hostile to the Party are exploiting its framework is such an elementary duty for every Party member that there is no need to issue a special resolution to that effect six years after the October Revolution. The very fact that such a resolution is deemed necessary is an extremely alarming symptom, alongside others, no less vivid. The need for such a resolution implies: a) that illegal opposition groups have formed within the party, groups that could pose a danger to the revolution; and b) that sentiments exist within the party allowing comrades who are aware of such groups[4] to refrain from reporting them to the party organization. Both these facts testify to a drastic deterioration in the internal party situation since the 12th Congress, where Central Committee reports had noted the complete unanimity of 90% of the party. It is true, that assessment was optimistically exaggerated even at the time. Very many party members, and by no means the worst among them, viewed with deep alarm the methods and tactics [*priëma*] employed to convene the 12th Congress.[5] The majority of the congress delegates shared this same anxiety. It is an indisputable fact that the overwhelming majority of the party, mindful of the

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[3] The proposal by the Dzerzhinsky commission cited by Trotsky—which obligated Communists to report opposition-minded groups not only to party bodies (the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission) but also to the GPU—demonstrated the party leadership's desire to safeguard the party's "monolithic unity" and its own power by directly delegating the function of intra-party surveillance to the GPU. —V.P. Vilkova

[4] This refers to *Rabochaia pravda* [Workers' Truth] and the "Workers' Group" of the RKP. —V.P. Vilkova

[5] By the "methods and tactics" used to convene the 12th Congress, Trotsky is referring to the fact that, on the eve of the congress, delegates at many provincial party conferences were elected without alternative candidates, based on the recommendations of provincial committee secretaries. These secretaries, in turn, had been elected since the summer of 1922 based on Central Committee recommendations—meaning [the delegates] were, in effect, appointed by the Central Committee Secretariat. —V.P. Vilkova

international situation and especially of Comrade Lenin's illness, was fully prepared to support the new Central Committee. It was precisely this desire to ensure the possibility of unanimous and successful party work, particularly in the economic sphere, that smoothed over factional divisions, compelling many to suppress their discontent and refrain from voicing their legitimate concerns from the congress rostrum. However, the new Central Committee's six months of work saw an intensification of the very methods and tactics used to convene the 12th Congress. The internal party consequences were twofold: the formation of openly hostile and embittered factions within the party, and the presence of numerous individuals who were aware of the danger yet failed to report it. We see here both a sharp deterioration in the internal party situation and an increasing estrangement of the Central Committee from the party.

2. The extreme deterioration of the situation within the Party stems from two causes: a) a fundamentally incorrect and unhealthy internal Party regime, and b) the dissatisfaction of workers and peasants with the grave economic situation—a situation that arose not only from objective difficulties but also from clear, fundamental errors in economic policy. As will become evident later, these two causes are closely interconnected.

3. The 12th Congress convened under the slogan of the *smychka*.[6] As the author of the theses on industry, I had warned the CC prior to the Congress of the grave danger that our economic tasks would once again be presented in an abstract, agitational manner at the 12th Congress, whereas the real task was to bring

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[6] A socio-economic term widely used in the political lexicon of the 1920s. Literally: closing, connection, linking. This refers to establishing a link between state industry and small-scale peasant farming through the use of commodity-money relations and the development of trade and markets—that is, on an economic basis. This was one of the fundamental elements of the New Economic Policy adopted at the 10th Congress of the RCP(b) in March 1921. —V.P. Vilkova

about a “shift in the Party’s attention and will” toward concrete, vital objectives—specifically, reducing the production costs of state-manufactured goods. I can only advise all members of the CC and the CCC to review the correspondence regarding this matter that took place within the Politburo at the time. I argued that if the *smychka* slogan were interpreted and utilized in a purely agitational way—ignoring its actual economic substance (planned economy; strict industrial concentration; drastic reduction of overhead costs in industry and trade)—then the very report on the organizational tasks of industry would lose all practical significance. Nevertheless, at the insistence of the Plenum, I delivered the report, striving on my part not to hinder the work of the incoming CC, which was being elected for the first time without Comrade Lenin.

4. The resolution on industry calls for strengthening and reinforcing the organization of Gosplan[7] and consolidating its position as the guiding planning body. It is highly significant that, following the 12th Congress, the CC received a note written by Comrade Lenin during his illness, in which he expressed the idea that Gosplan should be endowed with legislative—or rather, administrative-executive—powers.[8] In reality, however, Gosplan has been relegated to an even more marginal position since the Congress. While its work on specific assignments is useful and necessary, it bears absolutely no relation to the planned regulation of the economy as approved by the 12th Congress. The lack of planning coordination is most glaring in the operations of central and other key state economic bodies. Even more than before the 12th Congress, crucial economic issues are being decided by the

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[7] The Chairman of Gosplan in 1923 was G.M. Krzhizhanovsky. —V.P. Vilkova

[8] This refers to “On Granting Legislative Functions to Gosplan,” in V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii,* vol. 45, pp. 349–353, first published in the USSR in 1956. —V.P. Vilkova

Politburo hastily, without proper preparation, and in isolation from their broader planning context. On 19 September, Comrades Rykov and Piatakov—who are responsible for the leadership of state industry, with Comrade Rykov also bearing general responsibility for economic management—submitted a memorandum to the Central Committee. In it, they cautiously noted that "certain Politburo decisions compel us to point out that, under current circumstances, managing the state industry entrusted to us is becoming extremely difficult." Admittedly, the comrades in question decided against circulating their letter, deeming it inexpedient to spark a debate on the matter at the Plenum. However, this formal circumstance (the failure to circulate the letter) does nothing to alter the fact that economic administrators characterize the Politburo's policy on economic matters as one of haphazard, unsystematic decisions—decisions that make any sort of planned economic management "extremely difficult." In private conversations, this assessment is expressed in far more categorical terms. There is not a single Party or Soviet body where economic issues are examined and formulated with regard to their interconnections and in proper perspective. To be perfectly precise: there is no economic management—the chaos originates at the top.

5. Within the framework of this letter I shall not dwell on the specific characteristics of our policies regarding finance, the grain procurement industry, grain exports, or taxation, as doing so would require developing a highly complex argument supported by a vast amount of data. There can no longer be any doubt that a primary cause of the current trade and industrial crisis is the self-contained nature of our financial policy—that is, its lack of subordination to an overall economic plan. Isolated major industrial successes are being undermined, or risk being undermined, by a lack of coordination among the key elements of the state economy; moreover, given the very nature of the NEP, every setback in state

industry and state trade results in the growth of private capital at the expense of state capital. The defining feature of the current situation is that the monstrously widening disparity between industrial and agricultural prices amounts to a liquidation of the NEP; for the peasant—the foundation of the NEP—it makes no difference why he cannot make purchases: whether it is because trade has been banned by decree, or because two boxes of matches cost as much as a *pud* of grain.[9] I will not now paint a picture of how industrial concentration—a matter of life and death for industry—runs up against "political" (i.e., parochial) considerations at every turn and proceeds far more slowly than the prices of industrial goods. However, I consider it essential to address one specific aspect of the issue—one that, nevertheless, illuminates the entire problem with striking clarity, revealing what becomes of the Party's economic leadership in the absence of a plan, a system, and a correct Party line.

At the 12th Congress, the outrageous abuse of industrial and commercial advertisements by certain Party organizations was exposed.[10] What was the essence of this abuse? It lay in the fact that some Party organizations—which ought to guide economic bodies by instilling in them the highest standards of integrity, precision, thrift, and a sense of responsibility—were actually corrupting them by resorting to a crude and wasteful method of defrauding the state. Instead of simply levying a tax on industrial enterprises for the benefit of Party organizations—a practice that would have been illegal but at least made practical sense—they resorted to the compulsory solicitation of pointless advertisements, thereby squandering paper, printing labor, and so forth. The most scandalous aspect of this was that economic managers dared not

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[9] One *pud* = 16.38 kilos or 36.1 pounds. —t.d.

[10] This refers to the advertising of goods and services; see *Twelfth Congress of the RCP(b): Stenographic Report,* pp. 327–328. —V.P. Vilkova

resist this predatory behavior and demoralization; instead, they submissively paid for half a page or a full page of advertisements in some *Sputnik Kommunista* [Communist's Companion][11] type publication in strict compliance with the orders of a provincial Party committee secretary. Had any manager dared to object—that is, demonstrated a genuine understanding of Party duty—he would have been immediately branded as someone who did not acknowledge "Party leadership," with all the consequences that entailed. After the 12th Congress no improvement occurred in this regard, save, perhaps, in a few isolated localities. One would have to have absolutely no understanding of what proper economic management and a sense of responsibility entail to turn a blind eye to this sort of "management" of economic affairs, or to dismiss such phenomena as insignificant.

6. Undoubtedly, the 12th Congress, along with the entire Party, sought to strengthen the Party's guiding and supervisory influence over economic bodies—primarily by placing genuine responsibility on economic managers for the methods and results of their operations. Yet, precisely in this area (initiative, cost-efficiency, responsibility, etc.), achievements have been negligible. Moreover, mass discontent stems chiefly from the wastefulness and lack of oversight characterizing so many economic bodies, the heads which are all the more willing to submit to so-called Party "leadership" (manifested in pointless directives and other exactions) because their core activities remain, as before, beyond any real guidance or control.

7. The recent [September] Plenum of the Central Committee established an extraordinary commission to cut overhead costs and lower prices. This fact in itself is stark evidence of the flaws in our

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[11] Several small journals published by local party committees appeared under this title. — V.P. Vilkova

economic work. All the components of price had been analyzed in good time, and the decisions of the 12th Congress regarding the reduction of production and distribution costs had been adopted unanimously. The institutions responsible for bringing these decisions to life are well known: the Supreme Council of the National Economy (VSNKh), Gosplan, the Council of Labor and Defense (STO),[12] and the Politburo, acting as the guiding political body. What does the creation of an extraordinary commission signify in these circumstances? It means that the standing bodies, whose direct task is to ensure production at the lowest possible cost, have failed to deliver the necessary results. What can an extraordinary commission contribute? Operating from the outside, it can give a tug or a push here and there, insist on action, and finally, simply issue an administrative order to lower specific prices. Yet it is perfectly obvious that a mechanical reduction of prices by state agencies, driven by political pressure, will in most cases merely enrich middlemen and is unlikely to have any impact on the peasant market. Closing the "scissors gap,"[13] that is, achieving a genuine, real economic *smychka,* can only be accomplished through an organic process: rigorous planned concentration, the organic (rather than sporadic) implementation of overhead cost reductions, and the enforcement of genuine accountability among economic managers for their methods and results. The very creation of a commission to lower prices serves as eloquent—and simultaneously damning—proof of how a policy that ignores the importance of planned, flexible regulation, driven by the weight of its own inevitable consequences, returns to War Communist commanding of prices. The two approaches

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[12] In 1923, the Chairman of VSNKh was A.I. Rykov, and the Chairman of STO was V.I. Lenin. —V.P. Vilkova

[13] The "scissors gap" was shorthand for an ongoing market disparity faced by the peasantry, in which the escalating real price of manufactured goods they bought was in disparity relative to the declining real price of the grain they sold. —t.d.

complement each other only in undermining the economy rather than restoring its health.

8. The monstrous disparity in prices, compounded by the burden of the single tax—a burden stemming chiefly from the tax's lack of alignment with actual economic realities—has once again provoked extreme discontent among the peasantry. This discontent has affected the mood of the workers, both directly and indirectly. Ultimately, this shift in worker sentiment has spread to the rank-and-file of the Party. Opposition groups have revived and gained strength; their grievances have intensified. Thus, the *smychka*—from the peasant through the worker to the Party—has turned its other end against us. Those who failed to foresee this, or who turned a blind eye to it until the very last moment, have received a stark object lesson. General agitational slogans regarding the *smychka* yield results diametrically opposed to those intended unless the central problem is resolved: the rationalization of state industry and the closing of the "scissors." This lay at the heart of the acute conflict within the Politburo on the eve of the Twelfth Congress. Life provided an irrefutable answer to this dispute. This harsh lesson, a situation we have yet to remedy, could have been avoided, by half if not by three-quarters, had there been even a reasonably correct assessment of the interplay of economic factors and a planned approach to fundamental economic issues.

9. The 12th Congress identified the careful personal selection of economic administrators from top to bottom as one of the new Central Committee's key tasks. However, the Orgburo's approach to personnel selection took a completely different path. When it came to appointments, dismissals, and transfers, Party members were evaluated primarily based on the extent to which they might facilitate or hinder the maintenance of the internal Party regime—a regime enforced, tacitly and unofficially yet all the more

effectively, through the Orgburo and the Central Committee Secretariat. At the 12th Party Congress, it was stated that "independent" individuals were needed within the Central Committee. That word requires no further commentary today. Subsequently, this criterion of "independence" was applied by the General Secretariat[14] when appointing provincial committee secretaries, and then further down the line, from top to bottom, right down to the lowest-level cell. The effort to staff the Party hierarchy with comrades deemed "independent" by the Secretariat—in the sense mentioned above—was pursued with unprecedented intensity. There is no need to cite isolated examples now, given that the entire Party is aware of and discussing hundreds of the most prominent instances. I will point only to Ukraine, where the grave consequences of this truly disruptive practice are bound to make themselves felt in the coming months.[15]

10. Even at the height of War Communism, the practice of making appointments within the Party was not nearly as widespread as it is today. The appointment of provincial committee secretaries has now become the rule. This creates a position for the secretary that is, in essence, independent of the local organization. In the face of opposition, criticism, or discontent, the secretary resorts to transfers, leveraging the Center. At one Politburo meeting, it was noted with satisfaction that during the merger of provinces, the only question of interest to the merging organizations was who would become the secretary of the united provincial committee. Appointed by the Center—and thus virtually independent of the local organization—the secretary, in turn,

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[14] That is, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the RKP(b). —V.P. Vilkova

[15] Trotsky is referring to the removal of Kh.G. Rakovsky, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Ukraine, and the replacement of many Soviet officials in the republic following the June 1923 Plenum of the Central Committee of the CP(b) of Ukraine. —V.P. Vilkova

becomes the source of further appointments and dismissals within the province. The secretarial apparatus, built from the top down and becoming increasingly self-contained, gathers all the reins of power into its own hands. The participation of the Party rank-and-file in the actual shaping of the Party organization is becoming increasingly [illusory].[16] Over the past year or year and a half, a distinct "secretarial mentality" has emerged, characterized primarily by the conviction that a secretary is capable of deciding any and all issues without grasping the substance of the matter. We frequently observe comrades who displayed no organizational, administrative, or other aptitudes while heading Soviet institutions suddenly begin to issue authoritative rulings on economic, military, and other issues the moment they assume the post of secretary. This practice is all the more harmful because it dissipates and destroys the sense of responsibility.

11. The 10th Party Congress took place under the banner of workers' democracy.[17] Many speeches from that time defending workers' democracy struck me as exaggerated and largely demagogic given the incompatibility of a fully realized workers' democracy with a dictatorship. Yet it was abundantly clear that the stifling atmosphere of the War Communism era had to give way to a broader, more vibrant party life. However, the regime that took shape, largely before the 12th Congress and definitively consolidated and formalized thereafter, was far further removed from workers' democracy than the regime of even the harshest

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[16] The original document reads "transparent," likely a typographical error. —V.P. Vilkova

[17] The 10th Congress of the RKP(b) took place in Moscow from March 8 to 16, 1921. Among other things, it adopted a resolution "On Questions of Party Building," which addressed the need to democratize inner-party life (see: *Tenth Congress of the RKP(b): Stenographic Report.* Moscow, 1963, pp. 559–571). However, a year later, at the 11th Party Congress, G.E. Zinoviev was forced to admit that the 10th Congress' decisions regarding "workers' democracy" were not being implemented (see: *Eleventh Congress of the RKP(b): Stenographic Report.* Moscow, 1961, pp. 408, 427). —V.P. Vilkova

periods of War Communism. The bureaucratization of the party apparatus reached unprecedented levels through the use of "secretarial selection" methods. Whereas during the grimmest hours of the Civil War we debated, within party organizations and even in the press, issues such as the employment of "specialists,"[18] partisan versus regular army formations, discipline, and so forth, there is now no trace of such frank exchanges of opinion on matters that truly agitate the party. A vast stratum of party functionaries, embedded in the state or party apparatus, has emerged that completely eschews having an independent party opinion (or at least expressing one openly), acting as if the secretarial hierarchy were the sole mechanism for generating party opinion and decisions. Beneath this stratum of those who withhold their own views lies the broad mass of the party membership, for whom every decision appears merely as a call to action or a direct order. Within this main body of the party, there is a great deal of discontent stemming both from entirely legitimate grievances and from incidental causes. This discontent does not dissipate through open exchanges of opinion at Party meetings or through the influence of the rank-and-file on the Party organization (such as the election of Party committees, secretaries, etc.); instead, it accumulates in secret and subsequently leads to internal festering sores. While the official—i.e., secretarial—apparatus of the Party increasingly presents the image of an organization that has achieved near-automatic uniformity, reflection and judgment regarding the most acute and painful issues bypass the official Party apparatus, thereby creating conditions for the emergence of illegal groups [*gruppirovki*] within the Party.

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[18] This refers to the recruitment of military specialists from the former Tsarist army, colloquially known as *spetsy*, to work in Soviet military institutions and serve in the Red Army. —V.P. Vilkova

12. At the 12th Congress, a course was officially adopted favoring Old Bolsheviks.[19] It is perfectly obvious that the cadres of Old Bolsheviks, veterans of the underground, constitute the Party's revolutionary leaven and its organizational backbone. It is possible and necessary using all normal ideological and Party-based measures to facilitate the selection of Old Bolsheviks for leading Party posts—provided, of course, they possess the other requisite qualities. However, the method by which this selection is currently being carried out—the method of direct appointment from the top down—carries all the greater danger because it causes the Old Bolsheviks themselves to split into two groups at the top, based on the criterion of "independence." Old Bolshevism as such is coming to be viewed by the entire Party as somehow responsible for all the peculiarities of the current intra-Party regime and for its grave errors in the sphere of economic construction. One must not forget that the overwhelming majority of our Party members consists of young revolutionaries lacking underground experience or of individuals who have come over from other parties. The growing discontent with the self-contained secretarial apparatus that identifies itself with Old Bolshevism—should events continue to unfold along the same path—could have the gravest consequences for the preservation of the ideological hegemony and organizational leadership of the underground Bolsheviks within our current party of half a million members.

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[19] See: *Twelfth Congress of the RCP(b): Stenographic Report,* pp. 705–706. Here and in a number of other documents, terms such as "underground Bolsheviks," "undergrounders," and "Old Bolsheviks" refer to members of the Bolshevik Party who joined prior to 1917 and had a certain length of service under illegal ("underground") conditions. —V.P. Vilkova

13. An ominous symptom was the Politburo's attempt to base the budget on the sale of vodka[20]—that is, to make the revenues of the workers' state independent of the successes of economic construction. Only a resolute protest within the Central Committee and beyond halted this attempt, which would have dealt a devastating blow not only to economic work but to the Party itself. However, the idea of further legalizing vodka has not yet been rejected by the Central Committee. There is undoubtedly an intrinsic link between the self-contained nature of the secretarial apparatus, which is becoming increasingly independent of the Party, and the tendency to create a budget that is, as far as possible, independent of the successes or failures of the Party's collective construction efforts. The attempt to treat opposition to the legalization of vodka as virtually a crime against the Party and the removal from the editorial board of the central organ of a comrade who demanded freedom to discuss this disastrous plan will forever remain one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the Party.[21]

14. The army has been, and continues to be, severely affected by both the haphazard conduct of economic affairs and the internal Party regime described above. The Politburo's decisions regarding the army are always sporadic and ad hoc in nature. Fundamental questions concerning the army's structure and its preparation for military mobilization have never been examined by the Politburo; cluttered with a multitude of disparate issues, the body never has

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[20] At the CC Plenum held June 26–27, 1923, the question of introducing a state monopoly on vodka sales was discussed once again. In his letters from this period—specifically, in a letter to the CC and the CCC dated June 29—Trotsky categorically objected to using the state monopoly on vodka sales for fiscal purposes. —V.P. Vilkova

[21] Trotsky is referring to the change in the composition of the editorial board of the Party's central organ, the newspaper *Pravda*, and the removal of E.A. Preobrazhensky from it—a move carried out by I.V. Stalin (in the absence of *Pravda* editor-in-chief N.I. Bukharin) in July 1923. E.A. Preobrazhensky's "offense" lay in the fact that, as a supporter of L.D. Trotsky regarding the vodka sales issue, he had expressed disagreement with the Politburo's decision prohibiting the publication of debate materials on the subject in *Pravda*. —V.P. Vilkova

the opportunity to consider even a single question in its entirety or in a planned, systematic manner. Economic and international shocks prompt the Politburo to adopt diametrically opposed decisions regarding the army within very short periods of time. Without going into further detail, I will point out that by the time of the Curzon Ultimatum,[22] the question of increasing the army's size by one or two hundred thousand men had been raised twice in the Politburo, and it took considerable effort to fend off this proposal. In July, while I was on leave, the Central Committee Plenum instructed the Revolutionary Military Council to draft a plan for reducing the army by 50,000 or 100,000 men. The General Staff worked intensively on this assignment throughout July and August. At the end of August, however, the directive was rescinded due to events in Germany and replaced by an order to draft a plan for strengthening the army. Each such resolution, requiring complex and strenuous planning, triggers a series of corresponding proposals, orders, and inquiries sent from the center to the military districts. In the districts, this creates the impression that the Revolutionary Military Council lacks any guiding principle in its work. One Central Committee member—who, it would seem, ought to have known the source of these shifting impulses—even went so far as to articulate this conclusion regarding the contradictory nature of the Council's orders in print, within a military journal of the Ukrainian Military District.[23]

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[22] This refers to the memorandum from the British government drafted by Foreign Secretary G.N. Curzon. It was presented to the Soviet government on 8 May 1923, and contained demands for the recall of Soviet diplomats from Iran and Afghanistan and for apologies regarding actions against the British Empire that were characterized as improper; reduction of the Soviet coastal zone to 3 miles along the northern coast of the Kola Peninsula, etc. The British government threatened to terminate the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of 1921. In a reply dated May 11, 1923, the Soviet government rejected these demands while simultaneously agreeing to accommodate certain minor requests. In June 1923, both sides declared the conflict resolved. —V.P. Vilkova

[23] Trotsky is evidently referring to M.V. Frunze, who in 1923 was the commander of troops in Ukraine and Crimea; he had been elected a member of the Central Committee of the RKP(b) since 1921. —V.P. Vilkova

As for the Party-led screening process conducted under the guise of official Party institutions, it deals an equally severe blow to the army's morale and cohesion. The very same systematic campaign waged from above against, say, the old Ukrainian Council of People's Commissars has been, and continues to be, waged against the Revolutionary Military Council of the Republic. In this latter instance, however, the pace is somewhat slower, and the methods employed are rather more cautious and covert. In essence, however, the situation here as elsewhere is characterized by the preferential appointment of officials prepared to facilitate the isolation of the army's leadership body. A sense of duality is being imposed upon the military apparatus from above. Through various indirect means, and at times quite openly, the Revolutionary Military Council is being pitted against the Party; yet there is arguably no other Soviet institution that adheres so strictly, both in letter and in spirit, to Party mandates (as expressed in its congresses) and Politburo decisions alike. It permits neither criticism nor even discussion of these decisions within its ranks—even though, as previously noted, such decisions are not always distinguished by their practicality or coherence. The simplest solution would be to replace the Revolutionary Military Council. Yet, hesitating to take such a step for the time being, the Orgburo is pursuing an organizational policy within the military sphere that compels all serious army officials to ask themselves with alarm: where will this process stop, and what will it lead to?

15. Ensuring the army's combat readiness depends today—nine-tenths of the way—not on the military department, but on industry. The general lack of system in the economy has, naturally, been fully reflected in the industry that serves the army. The replacement of leadership personnel—carried out here, too, based on the criterion of "independence"—was executed with such haste that, during this exceptionally critical period, the military industry (where work ought to be proceeding with tenfold energy) has remained without an effective head for nearly three months.

Instead of focusing attention on industry as a whole—and the military industry in particular—an attempt was made at the last Plenum to include a group of Central Committee members, led by Comrade Stalin, in the Revolutionary Military Council. Regardless of the inner-party implications of this measure—which require no explanation—the very announcement of a new Revolutionary Military Council could not have been interpreted by our neighbors as anything other than a shift to a new, i.e., aggressive, policy. Only my protest, expressed in the most resolute terms, deterred the Plenum from immediately implementing the measure in question. The Plenum postponed the creation of the new Revolutionary Military Council "until mobilization." At first glance, it seems baffling to adopt such a decision in advance—circulating it in dozens of copies—when it is completely unknown when or under what conditions mobilization might occur (if it occurs at all), or exactly whom the Party might be able to assign to military work at that future moment. In reality, however, this seemingly obscure resolution is one of those indirect preparatory steps toward a predetermined goal—steps that are common practice for the Politburo and Orgburo. Furthermore, the Plenum resolved to immediately appoint one or two Central Committee members to the Revolutionary Military Council "specifically to oversee the military industry"—a body that was completely independent of the Revolutionary Military Council and had remained without a head for nearly three months. On these grounds, the Politburo appointed Comrades Lashevich and Voroshilov to the Council; notably, Comrade Voroshilov—appointed "specifically to oversee the military industry"—remained in Rostov.[24] In essence, this measure, too, is of the aforementioned preparatory nature. It is telling that when I reproached Comrade Kuibyshev, stating that the true

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[24] The headquarters of the North Caucasus Military District, commanded by K.E. Voroshilov, was located in Rostov. In 1924, I.V. Stalin would "transfer" Voroshilov to command the Moscow Military District, replacing the "Trotskyist" N.I. Muralov. —V.P. Vilkova

motives behind the proposed changes to the Revolutionary Military Council had nothing to do with the officially stated reasons, he not only failed to deny this contradiction—indeed, how could he?—but frankly told me: "We consider it necessary to wage a struggle against you, yet we cannot declare you an enemy; that is why we are forced to resort to such methods."

16. The current, rapidly escalating Party crisis cannot, of course, be resolved through repressive measures, regardless of whether they are right or wrong in any given instance. The objective difficulties of development are immense. Yet these difficulties are not alleviated but rather exacerbated by a fundamentally flawed Party regime: by the shifting of focus from constructive tasks to internal Party factionalism; and by an artificial selection process for personnel that frequently disregards their standing within the Party and the Soviet apparatus; the replacement of authoritative and competent leadership with formal orders designed solely to enforce passive discipline upon everyone. By undermining economic development, this internal party regime has been, and remains, the direct cause of growing discontent among some, apathy and passivity among others, and the effective sidelining of still others from the work at hand. The Party might perhaps tolerate the current, oppressive internal regime for a time if it were delivering economic successes. But it is not. That is why this regime cannot last long. It must be changed.

17. If the haphazard nature of economic policy and the secretarial bureaucracy of Party policy were already generating alarm long before the 12th Congress, then, on the other hand, no one likely expected that this policy would so quickly reveal its bankruptcy. The Party is entering perhaps the most critical era of its history burdened by the grave errors of its leading bodies. Party activity has been stifled. The Party observes with the utmost alarm the glaring contradictions in economic work and all their consequences. Perhaps with even greater alarm, the Party observes

the schism being artificially imposed from above at the cost of weakening leading Party and Soviet bodies. The Party knows that the official reasons given for appointments, dismissals, reassignments, and transfers by no means always coincide with the actual motives or the interests of the cause. As a result, the Party is demoralized. On the sixth anniversary of the October Revolution, and on the eve of a revolution in Germany, the Politburo finds itself discussing a draft resolution stating that every Party member is obliged to report illegal factions within the Party to Party institutions and the GPU.

It is perfectly obvious that such a regime and such a state of mind within the Party are incompatible with the tasks that may and, by all indications, will confront the Party as a result of the German revolution itself. Secretarial bureaucratism must be brought to an end. Party democracy—at least to the extent necessary to save the Party from the threat of ossification and degeneration—must be restored. The rank-and-file of the party must, within the framework of party loyalty, voice their grievances and gain a genuine opportunity—in accordance with the party statutes and, above all, the entire spirit of our party—to shape its organizational apparatus. We need to regroup party forces based on the actual requirements of the work, primarily in industry—and especially in the military sector. Without the genuine implementation of the 12th Congress resolutions regarding industry, it is impossible to ensure a reasonably stable level of workers' wages or to achieve a systematic rise in that level. The least painful and quickest way out of the situation would be for the current leadership group to recognize the full consequences of the regime it has artificially maintained and to show a sincere readiness to help steer party life onto a healthier course. In that event, the methods and organizational forms for a change of course could be found without difficulty. The Party would breathe a sigh of relief. This is precisely the path I propose to the Central Committee.

18. Members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission are aware that, while fighting with the utmost determination and clarity within the Central Committee against erroneous policies, particularly regarding the economy and internal party affairs, I have steadfastly refrained from taking this internal struggle to the judgment of even a very narrow circle of comrades, including those who, under a reasonably sound internal party course, ought to have held prominent positions in the Central Committee or the Central Control Commission. I am compelled to state that my efforts over the past year and a half[25] in this direction have yielded no results. This carries the risk that the party might be caught off guard by a crisis of exceptional severity; in that event, the party would have the right to accuse anyone who saw the danger but did not openly call it by its name of having placed form above substance.

In view of the situation that has arisen, I now consider it not only my right but also my duty to speak plainly to every party member whom I deem sufficiently prepared, mature, and steadfast, and therefore capable of helping the party emerge from the impasse without factional convulsions and upheavals.

L. Trotsky.
8 October 1923.

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[25] In this instance, L.D. Trotsky dates the period from the time of the first acute deterioration in V.I. Lenin's health (May 25–27, 1922) and his subsequent four-month absence, which coincided with the intensification of bureaucratic intrigues against L.D. Trotsky by G.E. Zinoviev, L.B. Kamenev and I.V. Stalin. —V.P. Vilkova